

Interview Summary: Mayor Jim Watson, City of Ottawa

Background

Jim Watson has been the Mayor of the City of Ottawa (the **City**) since 2010.

Mayor Watson was interviewed by Commission counsel Natalia Rodriguez, Jean-Simon Schoenholz, and Sajeda Hedaraly on August 18, 2022 and September 7, 2022. Questions about this summary should be directed to Jean-Simon Schoenholz.

Text contained in square brackets are explanatory notes provided by Commission Counsel to assist the reader.

Pre-Convoy Arrival

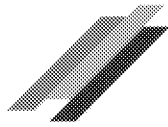
Mayor Watson first became aware of the Convoy in or about the week leading up to its arrival. He heard that there was a convoy of trucks making its way toward Ottawa from across the country. He does not recall whether he first heard this information from the media or from a staff member.

Mayor Watson was not involved in the City response and preparation for the arrival of the Convoy. That role was taken on by Mr. Steve Kanellakos, City Manager, and Mr. Kim Ayotte, General Manager of Emergency and Protective Services. Mr. Kanellakos regularly briefed Mayor Watson.

On January 26, 2022, Chief Sloly briefed Mayor Watson and Mr. Kanellakos on what to expect in the coming days. Information about the number of trucks expected to arrive in Ottawa was fluid.

Mayor Watson does not recall whether he had earlier discussions with Ottawa Police Service (**OPS**) Chief Peter Sloly. His office did receive a copy of an email from a local hotel association indicating that truckers were booking stays of at least 30 days¹ and this information was shared with law enforcement.

¹ Email from Beth Gooding, Director of Public Safety and head of the City's Office of Emergency Management, to Eustace A. Roberts, Emergency Management Business Continuity at OPS, January 25, 2022, **OTT00000070**; Email exchange between Steve Kanellakos, Mathieu Gravel, Serge Arpin, and Kim Ayotte, January 25, 2022, **OTT00000101**.



Preparation for the Arrival of the Convoy

The trucks started arriving on January 27, 2022. On that day, Mayor Watson saw a few trucks parked on City streets. Additional trucks arrived the following day. Over the first weekend, it became clear to the Mayor that OPS had lost Wellington Street, which was full of trucks. When the trucks did not leave on Sunday, he realized that they would be here longer than the weekend.

Mayor Watson was made aware that additional convoys were headed to Ottawa for the weekend of February 5, 2022. He also recalls that, at some point, there were discussions about the Ontario Provincial Police (the “**OPP**”) blocking exits off Highway 417. Mayor Watson is unsure of the exact timing of this discussion. He believes this decision would have been made jointly by the OPS and the OPP.

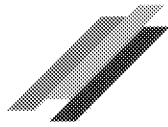
Communications with OPS and Requests for Resources from the Federal Government

Mayor Watson spoke to Chief Sloly, Deputy Chief Steve Bell, and Deputy Chief Trish Ferguson on an as-needed basis throughout the timeframe of the Convoy. He believes he attended ten to twelve Teams calls or meetings with them throughout the protests.

On January 31, 2022, the Prime Minister called Mayor Watson to check in and get an update on the situation. Mayor Watson explained to the Prime Minister that additional officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (the **RCMP**) were required to manage the protests. At that point in time, Mayor Watson did not request a specific number of officers but told the Prime Minister that OPS needed many more RCMP officers. He also raised the cost of the demonstrations and response. The Prime Minister said that he was there to help and was generally amenable to the Mayor's request but did not make any specific commitments.

On February 3, 2022, Mayor Watson had a call with Minister Mendicino to discuss the need for additional RCMP officers. The Mayor's understanding at that time was that the federal government had already provided approximately 250 officers at that point, but most of them were assigned to federal institutions. He understood that only about 100 RCMP officers were under OPS command at that time. The Mayor raised this issue with Minister Mendicino.

On February 5, 2022, Chief Sloly expressed the OPS' need for additional resources at a meeting of the Ottawa Police Services Board (the **OPSB**). On the following day, during a meeting between Mayor Watson, Councillor Diane Deans, and Chief Sloly, the latter



confirmed that he needed 1800 officers and later provided a document outlining the resources he needed.²

On February 7, 2022, at the request of the OPSB, Mayor Watson sent letters, co-signed by himself and Chair of OPSB Diane Deans, to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and to Minister Marco Mendicino, Ontario Premier Doug Ford, and Ontario Solicitor General Sylvia Jones.³ Mayor Watson's aim in sending the letter was to obtain resources to eventually provide relief for Ottawa residents.

On February 7 or 8, 2022, Mayor Watson spoke to the Prime Minister to echo the request made in the letter dated February 7, 2022.

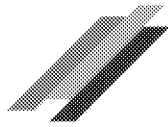
On February 7, 8 and 10, 2022, there were "tripartite" meetings in which Mayor Watson participated. He believes that Minister Bill Blair, Minister Mendicino, Mr. Kanellakos, Deputy Minister for Public Safety Rob Stewart, and Chief Slosly each participated in at least one of these meetings. The meetings were intended to be meetings among municipal, provincial and federal representatives. Ontario was invited to the meetings but did not participate. Premier Ford explained to the Mayor that he did not believe these meetings would be productive and that he would therefore not participate.

During the tripartite meetings, they discussed additional resources required in Ottawa. There was discussion regarding the actual numbers of RCMP officers that had been provided by the government as there appeared to be some disagreement regarding the numbers. The participants to the meetings also attempted to find ways in which each level of government could help resolve the situation. At one of the meetings, the fact that the City of Ottawa and the OPS had no towing capacity was raised. The Mayor did not make any requests for additional enforcement authority on behalf of OPS.

In the end, the Mayor believes that more than 1800 officers came to Ottawa under OPS command, including officers from the RCMP, OPP, and a number of municipal forces. The Mayor does not know what delayed the delivery of additional resources to Ottawa. He understood that RCMP resources were stretched because of protests across the country and that it took some time to work out some logistical issues, but does not know whether there were any other reasons for the delay.

² Email re OPS Requirements: **OTT00005223.0001**. See earlier email from the OPS advising of requirement for 1800 additional staffing and enforcement resources: **OTT00018172.0001**.

³ See Letter to Premier Ford and Solicitor Jones : **OPP00002000** and Letter to Prime Minister and Minister Mendicino : **OTT00004847.0001**



Other Communications

Provincial Actors

Mayor Watson had two calls with Premier Ford, although he is unsure when they took place. Premier Ford first spoke with Mayor Watson to check in and offer his support. The second call also included Solicitor General Jones. During this second call, Mayor Watson pleaded for additional resources from the province. The Solicitor General agreed to pass on the February 7, 2022 letter to the Commissioner of the OPP. The Solicitor General's understanding was that a large number of resources had already been sent to Ottawa by the OPP. The numbers provided by the Solicitor General were not reflective of the number of OPP officers on the ground and under OPS command (these numbers were provided to the Mayor by the OPS). This second call also included a discussion about the costs of the protests to the City. During that second call, Premier Ford and Solicitor General Jones expressed some concerns about the lack of police enforcement and organization in Ottawa.

The Mayor never discussed towing capacity with the province. He also never raised enforcement authority, although there were some discussions between the City and Ontario Ministry of Transportation (**MTO**) regarding the potential of leveraging insurance to end the protests. The MTO was reluctant to explore this idea further. The Mayor does not know why.

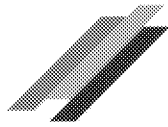
Mayor Watson also spoke with Ontario Minister of Finance Peter Bethlenfalvy. They discussed a program to help small businesses recover from the protests.

GoFundMe

On February 3, 2022, Mayor Watson, Mr. Kanellakos, and City Solicitor David White had a meeting with representatives from GoFundMe. [GoFundMe is a crowdfunding platform that was used by some protesters to raise funds in Ottawa.] Mayor Watson explained that they were funding, or helping to fund, what he considered to be unlawful activity. The GoFundMe representatives agreed to freeze the funds donated to the protest while they investigated. They later decided to shut down the fundraiser altogether and return funds to donors.

Mayor John Tory

Mayor Watson spoke with Toronto Mayor John Tory to find out where the City of Toronto had obtained tow trucks. Mayor Tory sent him the phone numbers of a few tow truck companies, which Mayor Watson forwarded to the OPS. Mayor Watson does not know if these were used by OPS. Mayor Tory also told Mayor Watson that he would send as many resources to Ottawa as possible and specifically offered to send the Toronto Police Mounted Unit to Ottawa.



February 6 Declaration of the State of Emergency

On February 6, 2022, Mayor Watson declared a state of emergency for the City on the advice of Mr. Kanellakos.⁴ While the declaration did not provide the Mayor with any new powers, Mayor Watson believed it was nonetheless symbolically important. The declaration of the state of emergency allowed the City to speed up some processes.

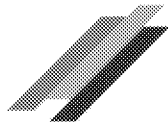
Negotiation with Convoy Organizers

On February 10 or 11, 2022, Mayor Watson received a call from Mr. Dean French, former Chief of Staff to Premier Ford. Mr. French told Mayor Watson that, given his contacts with the truckers, he thought he could help. Mayor Watson put Mr. French in contact with Mr. Serge Arpin, the Mayor's Chief of Staff, who engaged with Mr. French from that point forward. In parallel but separate to these discussions, Mr. Kanellakos met with protesters at the request of OPS. Chief Sloly and Deputy Chief Bell were aware of the meetings between the City and the protesters.

In the end, Mr. French was a helpful intermediary in the negotiation of a deal with the protesters on February 12, 2022. The focus of the plan was to move the protesters from residential neighborhoods on to Wellington Street in exchange for the Mayor meeting with protest organizers. The Mayor also recalled discussion of one or more staging areas out of the City where some trucks could park. The deal was not for protesters to leave the City entirely and the Mayor expected the police would still ultimately remove the protesters despite the deal. The Mayor understood that protest organizers wanted a meeting with a public official to give them some legitimacy and possibly to put pressure on the federal government to meet with them as well. The Mayor never met with protest organizers because the convoy organizers never followed up with a request, and they never moved the number of trucks that would have rendered such a meeting possible (75%).

On February 14, 2022, the Mayor understands that 102 vehicles were moved from residential areas to Wellington Street. Mr. French assisted in getting the job done. The OPS helped to direct traffic and with other logistical issues. Protesters never came back to the residential areas that were cleared. Deputy Chief Bell told Mayor Watson that this took some pressure off the downtown core, because it made the footprint of the demonstration smaller and more manageable, or words to that effect. No one at OPS ever expressed to Mayor Watson that the deal reached with the protesters would delay their plan. Mayor Watson saw this as a small win for the Ottawa residents who lived in the vicinity of the protests.

⁴ Declaration of Emergency in the City of Ottawa, February 6, 2022, **OTT00004231**.



Invocation of the Emergencies Act

According to Mayor Watson, one of the biggest issues during the protests was the lack of ability to move the trucks. He understands that the *Emergencies Act* (the **Act**) resolved that issue by forcing tow truck companies to provide towing vehicles. The OPS put decals over the names of the tow truck companies to avoid harassment and backlash against them. Mayor Watson was not consulted on the use of the Act by the federal government and never spoke to the provincial government about its invocation.

Mayor Watson does not know whether the provision of additional officers was related in any way to the federal declaration of emergency.

On March 1, 2022, Mayor Watson wrote a letter to the Prime Minister thanking him for the use of the Act.⁵ Mayor Watson is of the view that it helped to resolve the occupation in relatively short order.

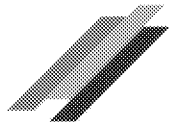
Chief Sloly's Departure from the OPS and Councillor Deans' Departure from the OPSB

Mayor Watson was not consulted before Chief Sloly's resignation from the OPS on February 15, 2022. He learned of Chief Sloly's departure when it became public. At the time, Mayor Watson still had confidence in Chief Sloly and was doing his best to support him.

On February 16, 2022, Mayor Watson met with Councillor Deans; he believes it was a Teams call. Councillor Deans, in her capacity as Chair of the OPSB, informed Mayor Watson that a candidate, Matthew Torigian, had been chosen to replace Chief Sloly. Mayor Watson strongly urged Councillor Deans not to sign the contract so as to avoid OPS having three chiefs of police in such a short time frame. [Deputy Chief Bell had been named Interim Chief following Chief Sloly's resignation.] Councillor Deans assured him that she would not sign the contract unless the Mayor supported the hiring. Yet, later that day, the Mayor was advised by Mr. Arpin that Councillor Deans had signed the contract.

Mayor Watson decided that he had lost faith in Councillor Deans. He was also concerned that a new chief of police was chosen without public consultation or outreach to community groups. He added that there had also been some concerns regarding the lack of communications between the OPSB, under Councillor Deans' leadership, and City Councillors. He explained that even though the OPSB is independent and does not report to Council, Council members are the ones receiving communications and questions from constituents and stakeholders. Mayor Watson asked his Chief of Staff to offer Councillor

⁵ Letter from Mayor Jim Watson to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, March 1, 2022, **OTT00009764**.



Deans an opportunity to step down, which she refused. She was removed from the OPSB by a majority of Council during a Council meeting later that day.

When asked, Mayor Watson acknowledged that he had a political history with Councillor Deans, during which they had often been political adversaries. During his tenure as mayor, Mayor Watson nonetheless recommended the appointment of Councillor Deans as the Chair of the Transit Commission, the Community and Protective Services Committee, and the OPSB over the course of three terms.

Mayor Watson was of the view that Councillor Carol Anne Meehan should resign from the OPSB, for similar reasons as Councillor Deans. Mayor Watson did not see a need for Councillor Rawlson King to resign from the OPSB. Mayor Watson explained that Councillor King was a new councillor who assumed the Mayor's seat on the OPSB. Councillor King was the Council Liaison for Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Relations Initiatives. He had also helped to establish Ottawa's Anti-Racism Secretariat. Mayor Watson felt it was important to have Councillor King on the OPSB.

Threats to Public Safety and Officials

Mayor Watson is aware that Councillor Fleury received a number of threats. The Mayor is also aware that someone made a death threat against him personally and was arrested. There were also many homophobic comments made on Twitter directed against Mayor Watson during this time.

Concluding Thoughts

In Mayor Watson's view, the City and police had the tools to deal with the situation but not the required law enforcement resources. In hindsight, removing the protesters early, before they got entrenched, might have ended the protests earlier.

Mayor Watson explained that, before the Convoy arrived, no one knew that they would stay for an extended period. Had police and the City been aware, they could have decided to close Wellington Street, for example.